

Unsavory Dinners

The Case of Sen. Dodd

APR 27 1966

By Roscoe Drummond

AS SEN. Thomas J. Dodd (D-Conn.) is painfully finding out, the testimonial dinner to raise funds to cover between-
c a m p align
costs of public life is a dubious, dangerous and disorderly device.

It may not be the worst method of augmenting the income of elected officials who do not have independent for-
struck down by public dis-
taste unless rigid safe-
guards against abuse are im-
posed by Congress.

The defense of the testimonial-dinner technique is this:

That the salaries and allowances given to Senators and Representatives are inadequate to take care of the costs of public life.

That elective office should not, in effect, be substantially limited to the wealthy.

That there is less obligation on the part of the Congressman if through a testimonial dinner many contribute small sums rather than a few giving him large sums.

That the testimonial-dinner gifts to Congressmen are a pretty common practice, not something recently thought up by the friends of Sen. Dodd.

WHY, THEN, is it proving so embarrassing to Sen. Dodd, whom I have found to be a most honorable man, to have the news of his three big Connecticut testimonial dinners come out as if they involved scandal?

The main reasons are that few of the donors really know to what exact purpose they are contributing the money, that neither the contributors nor the public know how the money is being spent, and that there are no ground rules as to the ethical ways the funds can properly be used.

All this is why it is crucial that the Senate Ethics

Committee come up with some positive reforms while it is looking into whether Sen. Dodd has been guilty of or the beneficiary of any improper practices. I would say that the very minimum reforms should be these:

1—Full public disclosure of the financial interests and income by all members of Congress and top congressional employees—a measure long advocated by Sen. Clifford P. Case (R-N, J.).

2—It should be mandatory that the precise fund-raising purpose of every testimonial dinner be publicly and fully stated.

3—The purposes for which such funds can be used should be set out and limited.

4—Funds so used should be periodically and publicly accounted for and certified by an outside public accountant.

IF THESE rules had been in effect, Sen. Dodd would not be so embarrassed by the disclosures about his testimonial dinners. He is one of numerous similar beneficiaries in Congress. One labor leader reported that he receives a minimum of 100 invitations a year for political testimonial dinners and that his union keeps a special fund earmarked for such contributions.

Will the Senate Ethics Committee come to grips with the needed reforms and, even if it does, will Congress enact them into law?

Answer: Only if there is a strong voter demand. As Sen. Case has often pointed out, legislatures are very reluctant to police themselves—however much they enjoy policing others.

© 1966 Publishers Newspaper Syndicate

STATINTL